The Interspecies Newsletter

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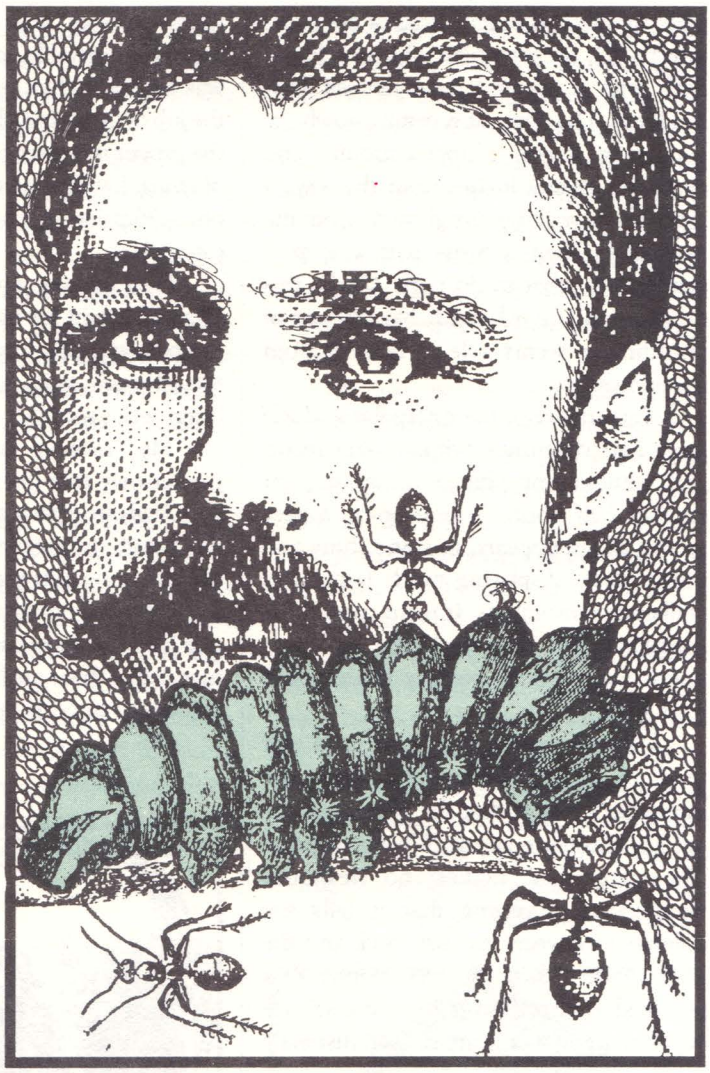
The Lesson



It's four o'clock on a cloudy June afternoon. The air is heavy, the show of flowers beckons me outside to pay homage. After walking around for twenty minutes, paying special attention to the indeterminant color of a mounding blue cranesbill, sniffing the gallica roses, counting all the basil plants that are thriving, I enter that mindless mood of quiet admiration that occurs so often at this time of year. Finally I take a seat in a fold-up chair in the herb garden to watch the graceful tarragon swaying in a minimal breeze.

It's been an especially hard week. A wet spring has brought on a particularly bad allergy season, causing my nose to take on a life of its own. And just yesterday I received an email informing me that a major film about my work with animals, working with an eighty-year old shaman in Central Asia who communicates to camels, has suddenly been cancelled by the director with no explanation. I don't know how to respond–how does anyone know how to respond to people who use non-communication as their primary means of communication? It's like trying to talk to the dead. Nonetheless, I've spent the afternoon trying to figure how to do it, after all the film would have kept me busy all next summer. Evidently, the shaman was filmed using overtone chants to inform a camel of the death of its keeper. The camel cried real tears. On camera.

So many weighty thoughts. My latest book is finally finished after a year of rewrites. Its a departure, a stretch, a kind of anti-adventure story–exploring the more surrealistic aspects of humans living for weeks in wilderness–like treating boredom as a form of grace. But the book is risky for a publisher. It has been accepted in New York and praised by the editor but now I worry about all the ways it will get manhandled by the marketing department.

An inch-long caterpillar suddenly appears on the garden bed in front of me. It must have fallen from the plum tree directly above my head where, clearly, it was up to no good munching on ripe shoots. It starts traipsing across the bed. I bend my head, observe it closely, watch its body fluids flow back and forth inside its translucent green skin, offering a perfect lesson in hydraulics. By tensing the muscles in its rear end, the fluids flow to the front, causing its head to thrust stiffly upward and fore. It drops its head, grabs the dirt with its front hooks, and pulls the rest of its body along. A brief moment of rest causes the fluids to flow back to its hind end in preparation for the next step. What a dance!

A red ant appears and, without any hesitation, attacks the much larger caterpillar, sinking its sharp incisors right into the caterpillar's face. Ah nature! The caterpillar answers by writhing forcefully, and then making a concerted effort to pry the ant off by levering it against the dirt. But this ant is not to be pried, now that the ant's incisors have grabbed hold, there is little the caterpillar can do to extricate it. I stare harder. For some reason, it seems important to discover if this ant has simply started eating the living caterpillar or, if instead, it is attempting to cut off a piece of flesh to carry back

to the anthill. A second ant appears, grabs hold of the caterpillar's mid-section. The caterpillar starts writhing in earnest. No matter that it makes no sound, I easily imagine it shrieking in horrible pain until the neighbors start calling.

A third ant appears. The new arrival causes a change in dynamic. Now, the caterpillar seems to sense its own impending doom in no uncertain terms. It know precisely what to do. Each time the new ant attempts to grab hold of the larger insect's tail, the caterpillar whips back and forth with a power I have not yet seen displayed. The new ant is getting nowhere. Each time it gets whipped around and deposited several inches from the fray, it retaliates by walking directly away from the caterpillar. Then it turns part way, as if deliberating what to do next. Maybe this deliberation is hard-wired. No amount of punishment seems able to deter it from attacking again.

This drama of the caterpillar and the three ants continues, without abatement, and without any change in tactics, for another half hour. At one point, a new species of ant appears, this one shiny and purple-black, displaying much faster, less deliberate movements. It rushs toward the caterpillar, but then suddenly seems to notice the red ants, because it turns and runs away.

I try an experiment, pick up a stiff piece of grass and carefully touch the caterpillar's rear end at the same spot the ant has chosen to attack. What a surprise. The caterpillar makes no response whatsoever, suggesting that it tells the difference between my own peck and the ant's attack. I drop the grass feeling a bit ashamed at myself for trying out a science experiment on a creature in such distress.

Big Thoughts

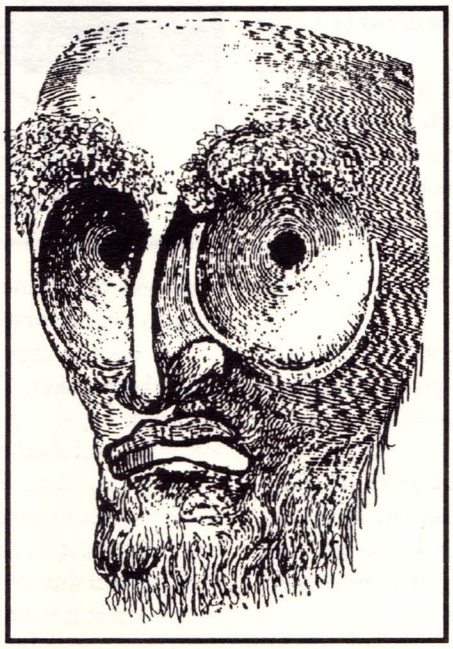
I'm not very skilled at observing anything quietly, for very long, without, eventually, letting big thoughts intrude to paint the big picture of what is occurring. Here's my big thought for this particular event.

Until science, (and let's not forget the moment the leisure class became the majority and TV appeared in everybody's home), no one thought of communication between species as a matter of predicting gestures, or assigning meaning to sounds or equating sounds with words. No one cared; it was all too intellectual. But before there was John Lilly and Koko the gorilla and double blind experiments and workshops on how to swim with dolphins, there was Aesop, Raven, and Coyote. What was primarily communicated between species was a matter of myth, metaphor, parable, drama. Before there was Martin Luther, Jesus, or Moses, it was the job of our spiritual leaders to sweat over the proper interpretation of the great issues of living, loving, and dying as acted out for our edification by creatures like ants and caterpillars.

I sit in my chair and watch this caterpillar fight for its life. I don't cry. But the personal cloud that has tagged behind me all week long, suddenly lifts. Call it interspecies solace.

My rational mind now argues persuasively that interceding with this life and death struggle getting played out in the dirt before my eyes must not be hindered. My education tells me not to play God.

But something else begins to effect mje far more persuasively. Why should it matter that these are lowly insects. What is this word, *lowly*? It doesn't matter that the caterpillar is a notorious predator of prune plums and that a good shake of the tree would probably produce a minor drizzle of them. If I laid them all next to one another, how long would it take me to identify each one as an individual? What an idea!



Myth does not blossom and bear fruit within the rational mind although, now, it is bursting, full-blown, inside me.

It only seems to matter that I see myself when I look at the caterpillar. And I don't see myself at all when I look, just as intently, at the three ants.

This reflection assures me that I am not neutral, I have taken sides. Maybe my flaw. Maybe my saving grace.

I pick up the caterpillar, stretch it out in my palm, use a fingernail to pry off one ant, and then the other one, drop them to the ground where they immediately start looking around for the next bit of protein to cross their path. Do they remember the caterpillar or is it already like a faraway-dream from my own last lifetime.

Placing the caterpillar back in the plum tree seems a little too altruistic. I decide to compromise, so put the caterpillar on a leaf high up on the tarragon plant. I have plenty of tarragon to spare.

Little Thoughts

I sit down again, place my hands behind my head, stare at the tarragon plant. Where's the caterpillar? My eyes search for it, branch by branch. Then I spy it. From five feet away my maiden in distress is reduced to an inconsequential green squiggle amidst the pale green finery of the three-foot tall herb. I have to stand and move closer if I hope to watch the caterpillar cope with its new surroundings.

When I finally leave the scene to answer a ringing telephone, the caterpillar is stretched out to its full length on a leaf.

That was yesterday. I haven't been back to check on it. Other things beckon. It's on its own now.

—Jim Nollman, 6/96

Brussels Conference

Brussels is the hub of the European Union, and people there take their city's status as the new capitol of Europe very seriously. The sense of idealism that pervades the ambience of this city made Brussels the ideal location for holding the May 1996 ICERC Fifth International Dolphin and Whale Conference–the first one in Europe. As the city seems steeped in a sense of unity and promise, so this biennial conference also possesses a unique focus of unity and promise.

In fact, of all the conferences I have attended over the years on the subject of whales and dolphins, this one is by far the most positive, the most all-inclusive, the most hawkeyed to a future world of friendly but increasingly sparse cetaceans. The credit for all this must be given to the sponsoring organization, ICERC, growing fast, now with offices in Australia, Tokyo, Aukland, and Brussels.

Most conferences provide a "vertical" focus for specific interest groups. Imagine allegorically, three meeting halls built next to one another in some huge urban conference center. In the first hall, five hundred marine biologists ponder the meaning of some research on the spectral analysis of minke whale blubber being used to determine the genetic identities of specific threatened populations off the coast of Norway. In the hall next door, five hundred envirnmentalists excoriate the Norwegian whaling fleet for continuing to kill minke whales. In the third hall, five hundred plain-folks whale lovers chant together in the hope of protecting minke whales and perhaps attempt to channel some benign whale energy right out of the North Atlantic and into the hearts of those in attendance.

The three different groups of people network in isolation from one another. They hold no group meetings. No mutual press conferences. Some members of all three groups view the others' focus as missing the point of what is truly important about whales. A minority go so far as to deny the validity of the other conferee's point of view.

As this absurd example is meant to demonstrate, the vertical context upholds a world of specialists. I've been there, seen it, done it, wondered why it has to be. And in so many ways, conferences which are meant to bring people together, as often as not keep people who hold key pieces of a larger puzzle from talking to one another by reinforcing the artificial position that they have nothing in common. It achieves this sleight of hand by redefining the concept *of the common interest* to accentuate all that is special with their specific field of interest while neutralizing all that is universal.

The true need remains. In this case, we all need to work extra hard to build bridges to connect better with one together, and to create processes and forums that allow for a sharing of information. Let us acknowledge mutual passions across platforms. Despite egos, positions, professions.

I suppose this harangue holds just as well for knitting conferences and marketing conferences as it does for whale conferences.

The first International conference that attempted to bridge the many disciplines that compose cetacean research was called *WhalesAlive*, produced by The Connecticut Cetacean Society, with the blessing of the International Whaling Commission. Philosophers, marine biologists, environmentalists, politicians all were given equal time at the podium. The focus of that conference was information across fields. There was a wonderful air of various professions sniffing keenly at one another for three days. Those who attended the original viewed it as a healthy novelty, an entertaining and provocative interlude to the more substantial business of more specialized conferences.

Unfortunately, this ecumenical focus proved to be a one-time affair, not to be confused with the Whalesalive conference held every year in Hawaii and which, despite the name, is much more of a manly and professional affair. The Hawaiian conference does not strive hard enough to achieve the unifying, networking spirit that defined its namesake.

The task of bringing disparate specialties together is today manfested best by ICERC a group that brings a much more gentle and perhaps feminine energy to the task. The reason is straightforward enough: ICERC's focus is community rather than information. In other words, how everyone relates to one another always seems to receive more attention than what anyone in particular has to say. I have always believed that most of the presenters end up saying the same thing on stage that they say at their other conferences. But the audience hears it differently because of the juxtapositions with other presenters talking totally different subjects. The whole is much greater–and perhaps more poetic–than the sum of its parts.

There is, of course, one unifying subject true to all the the presenters, and I have tried, in the next sentence, to hang a name on this subject once and for all:

ICERC brings together all the myriad individuals and fields of endeavor that palpate at the cusp where human beings meet cetaceans.

Synergy reigned at the Brussels conference. Scientists not only presented their papers on the same stage as environmentalists, artists, mystics, and business people, they often spoke together in a symposium format, complete with a moderator or a host versed in the threads that tie all these specialities together.

Whalewatching guides, whale publicists, and computer experts discussed

ways the internet is spreading the news about the economics of living, breathing whales, while providing new hi-tech ammo against the dying monster of whaling.

Other discussions were less linear, more metaphorical. One moderated discussion brought together Jacques Mayol, who holds the world free-diving record, with Michel Odent, a medical doctor who delivers births underwater, and a Andre von Elysabeth, a yogi master of pranayama breathing. How does it relate to dolphins? Actually, it provoked a nearly mythical discussion about why human beings turn to the cetaceans in search of answers to any question, including questions about health and power.

The best discussion of the conference honed in on the current rush to use dolphin photos in so much advertising. One speaker, Patrice van Eersel commented at length that, whereas companies have traditionally used photos of twenty year old females to sell cars and watches and chocolates, suddenly dolphins are being used to sell these products. The walls of the Tokyo subway system have so many cetacean pictures selling computers and magazines that it looks like the gift shop at an aquarium.

Why dolphins? You mean you don't already know the answer? It's friendliness, vitality, perfection of form. That ineluctable dolphin smile.

IC Speaks

This organization was represented by two very different presentations. The first one demands a little explanation.

Last summer, the conference promoter, Claude Traks, journeyed to my house to interview me on film as part of his conference promotion. During the two days he spent here, he talked to my two daughters, Claire aged eleven and Sasha eight, about their own experiences as participants in several Interspecies whale projects. He left us clearly impressed by the girl's ability to articulate their experiences with cetaceans. Realizing that a children's presentation was an essential missing element of the conference, he invited them to speak in Brussels.

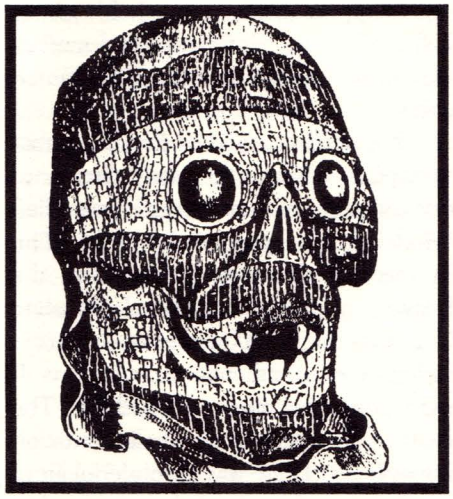
The girls worked hard on their presentation which eventually included a slide show and several audio samples of communication with orcas. At the conference, they were the youngest presenters on the program; speaking to seven hundred people just before John Lilly–who was the oldest presenter. It was an intriguing juxtaposition of speakers that completely engaged the audience.

IC's other presentation was a performance entitled *The Wild Heart*, which included the Seattle-based dancer Christian Swenson, a Dutch didgeridoo player, Rasta Robert, and myself. Our show comprised elements of mime, dance, live music, ceremony, and even lecture, in an attempt to demonstrate what it actually means to communicate with another species in the wild. The show was also presented at trhe National Theatre in Helsinki.

We plan to take *The Wild Heart* on a tour of Japan early next year.

Short Takes

IC is an active member of several information networks on the general subjects of nature, art, and media. The two networks that usually interest our members most are, first, the animal communications network and second, the dolphin/whale protection network. Here's a few recent blurbs from the two related worlds



● Eight captive show-trained dolphins living in a big pool at a luxury beach resort in Honduras recently escaped from their seaside pen after strong winds destroyed the natural barriers that kept them in. Intriguingly, eleven other dolphins decided to stay in the pool despite the damaged barrier. When the Associated press picked up the story the dolphins had been missing for ten days although resort personnel were still searching for them in the open Caribbean. In a statement that typically underscores the rationale of entertainment moguls who keep dolphins in captivity to do tricks and make money, Julio Galinda, the owner of Anthony's Key Resort declares that "the dolphins will die if we don't find them quickly...they were born in captivity, and do not know how to look for food." Despite that statement, no bodies have turned up, and so it may just as easily be presumed the dolphins are alive and well.

● 8, 11, 9, 13, 11, 13, 11, 7, 16, 12, 17, 12, 6, 8, 7. Yes these are lottery numbers. A loosing lottery based on science and caused by human behavior; these declining numbers are the aqctual right whale calves born to "our" Western North Atlanatic population by year from 1981 to 1995. Hovering just over 300, "our" right whales are outnumbered by people waiting on Provincetown's dock to get on summer whalewatches, and almost half show scars from boat impacts or net entanglements. These are the impact survivors, with an increasing number showing lesions that may be caused by impact stress. Their immune systems may also be stressed from our pollution of their coastal habitat. Cape Cod Bay is vital to them, potentially supporting up to 24 right whales in March, but only wityhout more human damage. Their slow recovery suffers from the severe genetic bottleneck we whaled them into, yet some seem to vanish offshore giving hope to pristine feeding and breeding grounds far from our impact. Science has provided us with this information to illuminate the right whale's plight. But you are the one who must use this information. "Our" legislators would prefer to ignore it and concentrate on short term profit. You

have to show them the facts, and how you feel. The right whale is one example. 1996 seems crammed with others. Do you feel overwhelmed? I often do.

by William Rossiter, From Whales Alive!, Jan '96. The publication of the Cetacean Society International, PO Box 953, Georgetown CT 06829

● On July 2, three friends were diving at Plate island in the Bay of Plenty in New Zealand. They were anchored close to the island when two of them dove out of sight of the boatman around the curve of the island, and descended down a sheer wall. Ascending several minutes later, at sixty feet of depth, they were approached by eight bottlenose dolphins. Two animals swam directly at the men, veering off only at the last moment. This was followed by several flips and swoops. The men were of the opinion that the dolphins were actually trying to hold them against the wall, making it impossible to ascend any further. The men became frightened, but as they were low in air, they tried, unsuccessfully, to get away from the dolphins.

While this was occuring, the boat was surrounded by six orcas. Some started nudging the boat while others spyhopped. The boatsman became alarmed and imagined that his buddies had been attacked. The orcas stayed nearby for five minutes then left.

The divers never saw the orcas. The boatsman never saw the dolphins.

from an occasional newsletter by Project Interlock USA, edited by Sheryl Gibney, PO Box 687, West Palm Beach FL 33402

● The hamlet of Broughton Island, off the east coast of Baffin Island is about as far removed from the smokestacks and sewers of industrial society as you can get. Living 1700 miles from the urban sprawl of Southern Ontario, the people of Broughton Island exist laregely off the sea, hunting whales, and seals. But their remoteness has not brought them immunity from pollution. In the past twenty years, scientists have detected an increasing number of chemicals in the blubber of the local marine mammals including PCBs, DDT, and even radioactive fallout from Chernobyl. In fact, every level of the Arctic food chain is contaminated, from plankton to polar bears to humans.

It is not just Broughton Island. Reduced sunlight, extensive ice cover, and the cold itself, conspire to slow the breakdown of chemicals all across the Arctic. Various substances arrive by different paths. After PCBs are spilled, or pesticides sprayed on crops, they evaporate and are carried long distances by prevailing winds. Radioactive wastes have been dumped, knowingly, by Soviet authorities in the Arctic seas for several years.

Marine mammals, who hold the toxins in their blubber and who reside at the top of the food chain are especially at risk. Lately, they are turning up with some of the highest levels of contaminants of any animals on the entire planet. Naturally, the people, mostly native and poor, who still rely on whales and seals for food are also starting to show clear signs of toxic poisoning.

capsulized from an article by Karen Twitchell appearing in Canadian Geographic, Feb/March 1991.

Humpback Music

Humpbacks are best known for the beautiful mating calls the males produce to attract females in winter in the tropics. They don't make these calls in summer.

The humpbacks who inhabit the coast of Alaska in summer are characterized by a variety of remarkable feeding behaviors that include the production of loud, trumpet-like feeding calls, which they use to frighten and herd schooling herring. These whales also demonstrate tool use, deploying large bubble nets around fish. The herring are consumed in a spectacular communal lunge as the whales rocket through the center of the bubble net.

Last summer, IC sponsored a project to Southeast Alaska to to test whether the humpbacks could be coaxed to interact acoustically with our own music making. It proved exceedingly easy to attract these huge beings to our boat, and for several hours at a time they would swim circles around us, listening closely. On a few occasions, certain whales seemed to make unique sounds in answer to our own music. These seemed like a mix of their feeding and their courting songs.

The scientists studying the whales in the area were both surprised and pleased that simple rhythms and the occasional raga were able to arouse the whales' curiosity.

Now, IC has been invited to spend August collaborating with the scientists of the Alaska Whale Foundation to determine to what extent the humpbacks will improvize sounds. AWF has already compiled a baseline of the sounds these whales are known to make in summer. Two weeks will be spent playing music onboard, transmitting it underwater, and then determining how the whales behave to this unique creative stimulus. As always, our own sounds will alter in response to the songs they make. As always, we will try to attract the whales to us by starting to play at a distance from them, and at a volume never louder than a small outboard motor.

Book Reviews

Listening to The Land

Edited by Derrick Jensen; Sierra Club Books, San Francisco; 1995

Derrick Jensen is that rare interviewer whose depth of insight brings to mind no one else but Bill Moyers. Jensen possesses the rare gift to bring as much thoughtfulness to his questions as his notable cast of interviewees bring to their answers. His subject matter runs the gamut from nature to culture to social justice. By the time most readers reach the end of this book, having spent time listening in on conversations with thirty of the wisest people of this age, he or she will have little lingering doubt why these three subjects must be properly integrated if we are to have any real hope of granting our children a bright future.

...**(Paul Shepard)** I think that planetary ecological disaster is a reality. But the popular imagination is in error. It is not something that may happen. We have been in the midst of it for the last century. Because of our Biblical and Hollywood imagery of catastrophe, we suppose all such disasters to be a kind of Armageddon, with walls collapsing and people screaming. It's not like that at all. It's much worse, a creeping thing that we identify as something else–inflation, poverty, recession, levels of mental ill-health, suicide, crop failure, political upheaval, famine, social discontent–anything except its true nature, the disintegration of natural systems. It has nothing to do with the media question, "Will mankind survive?" Because a species as tough as ours is not yet ready to join the cavalcade into eventual extinction. Of course I have hope. Why not, it's cheap and available. It is also the last resort. It allows one to be seen as chipping away defiantly at "the problem" rather than taking one's misanthropy off into the rubble to await some final bell.

...**(Frederick Turner)** All of us, though, *do* have some kind of special knowledge of what it once meant to be so connected. This knowledge is in our archaic brain stem and can never be expunged. It can be covered over, and *is* covered over, with layers and layers of cultural applique, and maybe with the development of the cerebral cortex, but it can never be erased. Wherever we come in contact with the natural world, it is awakened.

...**(Jerry Mander)** People are now faster than the natural world, literally. That's not just an intellectual separation. It's a real separation. A concrete separation. A physical separation. It's a separation of the body and the nervous system from their former relationship to the natural world into a dimension that moves faster and is tenser and therefore more prone to react speedily and violently to circumstances. This new dimension is not conducive to pleasure, or calm, or contemplation, or understanding, or depth.

Language of Animals

Stephen Hart, Henry Holt Company, New York, 1996

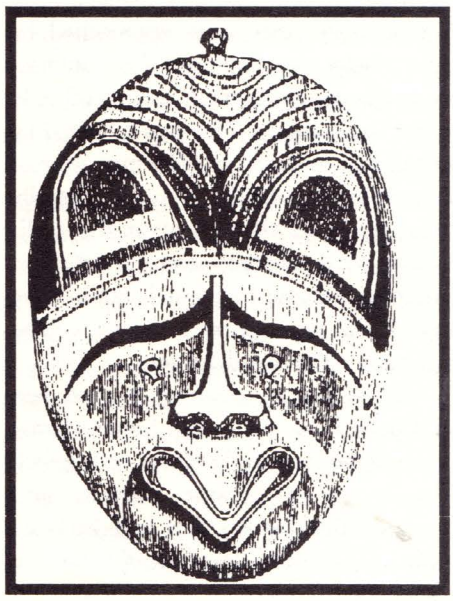
We have long needed a general overview of all the information collected on the communication capabilities of animals. This overview contains material not only about the usual gang of smart chimps and dolphins grabbed from the wild to learn the bidding of their laboratory masters, but also includes sections about songbirds, insects, dogs, and even squid who use their ability to change color as a sexual communication.

This little book is succinct and pretty with illustrations; published as part of a larger series edited by the staff of Scientific American. That explains why the writer sometimes displays his stance a bit too much like a harsh patriarch who has no patience for imaginative explanations of phenomena that strays outside the borders of his rationalist boundaries.

...Springboks, small antelopes of the Kalahari desert, communicate their excellent health to hunting dogs or hyenas with a curious behavior called "stotting." Instead of running flat out when they see a predator, some springboks punctuate their escape with soaring leaps in the air. Jumping higher than their neighbors backs, with legs held stiff and parallel like a gymnast's, the springboks appear to say, "there's no use chasing me, I could obviously outrun you."

...most scientists concluded that Lilly's speculations were extremely unlikely and completely unsupported. The great popular success of Lilly's 1961 book, *Man and Dolphin*, contributed to the widely held belief that dolphins are especially intelligent and perhaps that animals in general have languages akin to human language. While Lilly's work may have increased public awareness of the need to protect and conserve dolphins, it did so at the cost of public misunderstanding. Dolphins–and for that matter all animals–need not be like humans to deserve our respect.

...Male stoneflies actively search out their mates. A male of one species makes the first move, a brief crescendo of dull taps: "ba da da Da DA DA dum." Another species marches to a different drum beat: "ta TA TA TA TA," and the female responds "ta-a-ta-ta-ta. Stonefly specialists have studied about 150 species, each with its own pattern.



Man and the Natural World

by Keith Thomas, Pantheon Books, NY, 1983

This book is a virtuoso study of humankind's place in nature. It is a reference book of the first magnitude, and deserves to be in the library of any researcher working in the fields of ecology, human/nature relations, animal rights, and biology. Thomas is a historian. He has sifted through myriad and sometimes very obscure historical documents, mostly English from the middle ages through the nineteenth century that concern human relations to the land, animals, and plants. As I writer, I sometimes peruse the book at random, and am constantly humbled by the scope of the text, and by Thomas's remarkable ability to tell his story from so many disparate sources, times, and points of view. This book has long been one of the two or three main reference works of my writing career, and it deserves a much greater readership.

...A county clergyman in the reign of Queen Anne even claimed to have seen a group of crows planting a grove of oaks, which twenty-five years later, were high enough to offer a safe site for their nests. "Instinct" on this scale seemed hard to distinguish from reason. Of course, many philosophers continued to maintain that instinct unlike reason,. was incapable of improvement; the difference was of kind not degree, and the barrier between man and animals recognizably distinct. But others regarded "animal instinct" and "human reason" as merely different degrees of the same quality. Man was only superior because he had acquired a greater number of such "instincts". "Experimental reasoning" said David Hume, was "nothing but a species of instinct".

...Descartes absolved God from the charge of unjustly causing pain to innocent beasts by permitting humans to ill-treat them; he also justified the ascendancy of men by freeing them, as he put it, from "any suspicion of crime, however often they may eat or kill animals. By denying the immortality of beasts, it removed any lingering doubts about the human right to exploit the brute creation. For, as the Cartesians observed, if animals really had an immortal element, the liberties men took with them would be impossible to justify.

...It was with human needs in mind that the animals had been carefully designed and distributed. Camels, observed a preacher in 1696, had been sensibly allotted to Arabia, where there was no water, and sdavage beasts "sent to deserts where they may do less harm." It was a sign of God's providence that fierce animals were less prolific than domestic ones and that they "lived in dens by day, usually coming out only at night when men were in bed." The physician George Cheyne in 1705 explained that the creator made the horse's excrement smell sweet, because he knew that men would often be in its vicinity.

...The lobster, observed the Elizabethan George Owen, served several purposes in one: it provided men with food, for they could eat its flesh; with exercise, for they first had to crack its legs and claws; and with an object of contemplation, for they could "behold its wonderful suit of armour, with its tases, vaunthraces, poudrons, coushes, gauntlets, and gorgets curiously wrought and forged by the most admirable workman of the world."

The Jungle Books

By Rudyard Kipling, Doubleday and Company, NY, 1948

I recently read this two-volume classic aloud to my youngest. It was a delight for both of us, and made me recall once again, how much a master Kipling was at delving deeply into the souls of animals. Walt Disney mangled the story for an entire generation of children by presenting the jungle creatures as a kind of "our gang" with its bullies, it's fat boy, it's black boy, and an apple pie kid with the eccentric name of Mowgli. Kipling's Mowgli is far stranger, far more wonderful, as unique as the genius kid in *Searching for Bobby Fisher*, and the boy with a powers over electricity in *Powder*. There is a good reason why almost all the human's that Mowgli interacts with regard him as a semi-supernatural being.

Mowgli's descent into an ancient Hindi ruin with its deep well full of jewels guarded over by a blind, white monster cobra is one of the most evocative images in all of English Literature. Mowgli escapes only with a knife to avenge the death of his wolf-brothers and sisters. That such images are entirely accessible and utterly spellbinding–but not frightening to an eight year old–makes it more remarkable still. Mowgli's world of bear and wolf and sher kahn, the tiger, is one of the best books on interspecies communication ever written.

...It was not for fun that he had learned while he was with the wolves to imitate the challenge of bucks in the jungle and the grunt of the little wild pig. So as soon as Messua pronounced a word Mowgli would imitate it almost perfectly, and before dark he had learned the names of many things in her hut.

...By the Law of the Jungle it is death to kill at the drinking places once the Water Truce has been declared. The reason of this is that drinking comes before eating. Everyone in the Jungle can scramble along somehow when only game is scarce; but water is water, and when there is but one source of supply, all hunting stops while the Jungle-People go there for their needs.